

Unity With Nature Committee Report to RepCom 2012

Greetings from all of us on the Unity With Nature Committee. We are 8 loyal and stalwart “Earthcarers” (We sadly lost our dear Friend Sandra Lewis of Strawberry Creek): Susan Swanstrom from Redwood Forest, Nathan Helm-Burger from Grass Valley, Muriel Strand from Sacramento, Steve Harris from Palo Alto, Joe Morris from Santa Monica, Oliver Ryder from La Jolla, and Maia Wolff from Central Coast who is co-clerk along with myself, Renie Wong Lindley, from Honolulu. A far-flung group! It almost sounds like you could make a verse for “This Land is Your Land” from the various homelands represented.

I wish to take a moment for each of us to think of our own homeland, because, even though we may feel we are immigrants, even though many of us have traveled far from our birthplace, or the birthplace of our ancestors, we take up the land we live in now, to cherish, to be fully aware of its inherent vitality. You belong to a place—it doesn’t belong to you. Be a part of it and acknowledge its beauty. Don’t try to add the negative, such as what humans have done to it. At least not in this moment of silence..... Bring that piece of nature with you; even just a token, or a memory, and let it stand beside you and enrich you as you listen to the report, or even perhaps as you go about your day.

Unity With Nature committee has a commitment to you. We are charged with the duty of acting on your behalf on spiritual concerns as related to the care of the earth. We understand that this means, in part, that we support you and your Meeting community and our PYM community in efforts to live simply and sustainably. And we endeavor to be “patterns and examples” of living in right relationship with the earth. In 2007 PYM approved a Global Climate Crisis Minute. From that year on, Unity With Nature committee has taken to heart its responsibilities to you and has become a very active committee in the following ways:

- Working with PYM Gathering staff to make knowledgeable food and transportation choices available to participants
- Being a resource to encourage each other on ways to reduce our contribution to global warming
- Developing contacts and networking among individual meetings
- Engaging in discernment for a Testimony of Sustainability

2011 was Joe Morris’ last year as clerk of Unity With Nature. During that year the committee accomplished the following projects:

1. Developed, offered and presented “mini-grants” after the model of Quaker Earthcare Witness. Six Meetings applied with a number of projects; three were selected, and their reports follow.

Casa de los Amigos (Nicholas Wright) received \$350 from the Mini-grant fund and spent \$355 of their own money. Their project was to purchase a new washing machine which would have ultra-low water and electricity usage. They had trouble immediately with the Whirlpool model they had chosen. The first one was defective and was replaced. But apparently the model is very sensitive to small changes in voltage and impossible to fix. Some major changes such as a transformer blowing up a block from them have resulted in further problems. They are currently trying to get Whirlpool to exchange the machine. But lessons were learned, and in the meantime

their overall goal of lowering water use and making their choices visible to the community are successful first steps.

Live Oak Friends Meeting (Robin Keeler) received \$200 from the Mini-grant fund. They coordinated with Oasis Charter School (where they have Meetings for Worship) to build a raised bed for growing vegetables on school property. Live Oak Friends donated and brought in topsoil to fill the bed. Both Oasis School and Live Oak Friends were pleased to be funded by Unity With Nature for this project.

Redwood Forest Friends Meeting (Susan Swanstrom) received \$350 from the Mini-grant fund to start a rain catchment system. The project has not yet begun. Redwood Forest has created a committee to look into expanding the project to include more work on their irrigation system.

2. Proposed a “Sustainability Coordinator” at the 2011 RepCom. The idea was originally inspired by Kate Carpenter and Maia Wolff’s work at “greening PYM” and would have meant there would be a “point person” rather than a committee doing the job of coordinating sustainability concerns with the arrangement clerks. Although there were too many questions and not enough time for discernment to allow unity on the proposal, the UWN Committee continued to keep awareness of sustainability and simplicity in the forefront of our work on those issues. To that end:
3. Susan Swanstrom, Kate Carpenter and Maia Wolff worked on sustainability for the 2011 PYM Gathering, such as food, energy use, dishware, biking and ridesharing.
4. UWN led Interest Groups at PYM;
 - “Quaker Values and the Good Food Fight” (Maia Wolff and Kate Carpenter) discussed the agribusiness food system and how chemicals, mechanization and fossil fuels are pitted against small farmers and indigenous people.
 - “Toward a Testimony of Sustainability (or, Earthcare Testimony)” (Sandra Lewis and Joe Morris) turned out to be a threshing on what makes a testimony. Is it to be a “beacon” which we strive to become, or a “floodlight” in which we are witnessing our testimony here and now?
 - “A Friends’ Dialogue on Nuclear Power” (Joe Morris and Anthony Manousos) introduced the proposed minute in an evening conversation.
5. Brought the proposed minute on Nuclear Power to the PYM plenary July 28, 2011. The PYM clerk did not test for unity since there was not adequate time to address the proposal and accepted it instead as a report.

This year, 2012, we are co-clerked by Maia Wolff and myself, Renie Wong Lindley. We started the new organization with an enriching, inspiring retreat last October in Susan Swanstrom’s idyllic new home in the redwoods of Forestville, on a hilltop above the Russian River. At the retreat we contemplated “glimpses” or transformative moments with nature, and asked ourselves what our visions are for our committee’s work. Then we consolidated them into specific actions:

1. Work with Friends Journal and Western Friend to offer articles or tidbits on the spiritual foundations of Earthcare, and interviews of personal stories of Friends’ mystical experiences, or success at a particular earthcare endeavor.
2. Expand Mini-grant program by increased fundraising activities during PYM Gathering.

3. Coordinate with PYM Arrangement Clerk(s) to get Transportation Calculations and Food Choices on the registration forms.
4. Re-invigorate the UWN Contacts in Meetings, start a listserv (to talk about Earthcare subjects). Write a letter to all Meetings offering information resources and committee member visits on the following topic: “Our fossil fuel (including nuclear) ‘addiction’; what is our ideal and sustainable future?”

This year we will again try to bring awareness of how food and transportation choices affect the environment to PYM, through adding material to the registration form and through our posters and fliers. We will again offer Interest Groups, one on Food Choices and one to follow up with the letter we sent out, on What is our Ideal and Sustainable Future? Our table at the Gathering will be expanded to include ceramics, canned goods, photos and poems as posters and cards. This is to fundraise for the next round of Mini-grants.

We continue to hold the Testimony of Sustainability as a beacon and wish to make our PYM community more aware of energy consumption, more aware of the man-made events and choices that have caused contamination to the soil, caused degraded living conditions for all creatures, and poverty and war to many who cannot even sustain one more atrocity. This is a tall order with many necessary tiny but timely steps in between.